

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 AID-05
EB-07 AGRE-00 COME-00 TRSE-00 /065 W
-----112779 191151Z /43

R 190845Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8888

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KATHMANDU 2990

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, IN, NP

SUBJ: VISIT OF INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

1. INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE'S THREE-DAY VISIT TO NEPAL ENDED JULY 16 WITH A BLAND PUBLIC STATEMENT BUT LITTLE IN THE WAY OF SUBSTANTIVE IMPROVEMENTS IN INDO-NEPAL RELATIONS. DURING HIS STAY HE HAD TALKS WITH KING BIRENDRA, PRIME MINISTER GIRI, FOREIGN MINISTER ARYAL AND OTHER OFFICIALS. THE NEPALESE HAD HAD SOME HOPE FOR UTILIZING THE VISIT AS AN OCCASION FOR MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ON A NEW TRADE AND TRANSIT TREATY, AS WELL AS FOR MAKING FRESH BEGINNINGS ON OTHER CHRONIC IRRITANTS WHICH HAD EXISTED DURING THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENT. INSTEAD, VAJPAYEE RESTRICTED TALKS TO A "GETTING-TO-KNOW YOU" LEVEL AND GENERALLY AVOIDED ANY COMMITMENTS OR NEW DEPARTURES. ONE OF THE FEW CONCRETE ACCOMPLISHMENTS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN INDIAN CONCURRENCE IN PRINCIPLE TO NEPAL'S USE OF THE RADHIKAPUR CORRIDOR, ON A ONE-TIME BASIS AT LEAST, FOR THE SHIPMENT OF A CONSIGNMENT OF RICE TO BANGLADESH.

2. FOREIGN SECRETARY BHATT TOLD US JULY 18, THAT, WHILE THERE HAD BEEN NO MAJOR CONCRETE ACHIEVEMENTS, THERE HAD BEEN A FEW POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS INCLUDING, IN ADDITION
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TO THE USE OF RADHIKAPUR, INDIA'S AGREEMENT TO UNDERTAKE A GROUND SURVEY ON THE FEASIBILITY OF THE PROPOSED DOLAGHAT-DHANKUTA ROAD. HE THOUGHT THAT THE ACTION OF BOTH THE NEPALESE AND INDIAN PRESS IN HIGHLIGHTING VAJPAYEE'S STATEMENT THAT HE HAD AN "OPEN MIND" ON NEPAL'S ZONE OF PEACE PROPOSAL WAS MISLEADING, PARTICULARLY AS VAJPAYEE HAD MADE THAT COMMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA'S INTEREST

IN SEEING ALL OF SOUTH ASIA AS AN "AREA OF PEACE", WHICH BHATT THOUGHT WAS BESIDES THE POINT, AS NEPAL'S ZONE OF PEACE PROPOSAL INVOLVED ONLY INDIA AND CHINA, AND NOT ALL OF SOUTH ASIA. BHATT SAID NEPAL HAD GIVEN THE INDIANS A LIST OF CHANGES IT WANTED IN A NEW TRADE AND TRANSIT AGREEMENT, AND IT REMAINED TO BE SEEN HOW THE INDIANS WOULD REACT TO THESE. HE ADDED THAT HE SAW NO POINT IN A NEW ROUND OF FORMAL TALKS UNTIL THE INDIAN REACTION WAS KNOWN. BHATT ALSO THOUGHT THAT VAJPAYEE COULD HAVE BEEN MORE FORTHCOMING IN RESPONSE TO NEPALESE COMPLAINTS ABOUT CRITICISMS OF NEPAL IN THE INDIA MEDIA, AND, WHILE WELCOMING VAJPAYEE'S AND PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S STATEMENTS ON NON-INTERFERENCE IN NEPAL'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS, WAS NOT CONFIDENT OVER THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO RESTRAIN THE SOCIALIST WING OF JANATA ON B.P. KOIRALA AFTER KOIRALA RETURNS FROM THE U.S.
HECK

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MINISTERIAL VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 19-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977KATHMA02990
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770268-0296
Format: TEL
From: KATHMANDU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770744/aaaabltp.tel
Line Count: 80
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 9e6e9a67-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1821241
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VISIT OF INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER
TAGS: PFOR, OVIP, IN, NP, (VAJPAYEE, ATAL BEHARI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9e6e9a67-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009